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SUCCESS STORY

Yes We Can Too!

Disability is not inability - lessons from Vavuniya



USAID/Sri Lanka

Tharushi Malsha Wickramasingha from Vavuniya races to first place in the 50m and 75m sprints for hearing impaired girls under ten years old.

USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives in Sri Lanka supported a national sports competition for disabled children from across the country. Hosted in the northern town of Vavuniya, the event included participants from conflict affected communities in the east and north.

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October 2010 – For two days, children and young people from the north, south, and, for the first time, the east of Sri Lanka came together for a sports competition. What was special is that while they are disabled, coming together sent a strong message to the country that if reintegration and cooperation is possible for them, so it is for the nation as a whole.

The Organization for Rehabilitation of the Handicapped (ORHAN), established in 1998, has brought together differently-abled children and youth from across the country each year for the last six years. This year, 411 disabled children and youth from Sri Lanka's Vavuniya, Matara, Batticaloa and Mannar districts participated in the 215 events. Sports Meet 2010, held October 23-24 in Vavuniya was supported by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives.

In a remarkable display of talent, the participants demonstrated that disability does not mean inability. 492 medals were awarded, for track and field events including high jump, long jump, sprinting and relay races, shot put, and javelin. A variety of special events were also included to ensure that participants with every ability were able to take part, including the sack race.

Coordinating organizations, who hosted divisional trials in each district, showed their support as teachers and supporters sprinted alongside their teammates, shouting encouragement and sharing in the emotion and excitement.

Sri Lanka, divided by more than three decades of bitter conflict, is looking forward to peace following the end of military operations in the north and the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009.

This year, for the first time and with support from USAID, Batticaloa District, from the east of the island, was able to send participants for this annual event, strengthening interactions between communities, forming links between organizations that support differently-abled children and youth, and demonstrating that an integrated, cooperative future is clearly possible

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